

FAMILY TRANSITION AT MARRIAGE 133

and consists ordinarily of a kitchen, occupying the greater part of the rectangle, and a second room, behind the hearth and chimney which occupy most of one end of the kitchen. There are sometimes one or two bedrooms at the opposite end of the kitchen, in addition. In East Clare this type of house is common, but there is also a squarer type which may have a second story. 342

The tiny peasant cabins dating from the last century are of the West Clare type; they were and are single-gabled, rectangular blocks of one or two rooms, with steep, thatched roofs and a single half-door on each side. The half-doors open directly out of the kitchen, the one to the windward kept closed. The modern stone cottages erected by the governmental agencies and patterned after those built first by the Congested Districts Board (1893-1923) are slated and weatherproofed. Except for additional four rooms, they represent the same pattern. It is impossible to give a statistical statement of the occurrence of this type of house or to correlate its numbers with those of the small farm families, but housing records show that 36 per cent of Clare's population live in three-room dwellings, 24 per cent in four-room dwellings, and 12 per cent in two-room dwellings, which seems to point to a fairly close correspondence between the proportion of small farm population to total population. [362]

In the small farmer's house of this type, the kitchen is the seat of family life. In it are the hearth, at which cooking is done, the table around which the family — first the adult males, then the women and children — eat, the kitchen utensils, and the religious shrine of the "Blessed Lamp" and the Sacred Heart picture before which the family prays the "Family Rosary" at night. Here also is the "dresser" found in nearly every small farmer's house, a sideboard filled with fancy china and porcelain used only for family festivals and to give to marrying relatives. The family will part 592
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[778] ●
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In Tuosist the reason given to me by my father and some other old people was that ill-luck would fall upon Kerry and especially on the parish of Tuosist, if the Corkmen succeeded in forcing the coffin across Leac na gCorp and laid it down on Kerry soil. Sickness, bad crops, and misfortunes of many kinds would follow the corpse, if it were laid beyond the boundary-stone. This is undoubtedly the original reason for the defence of the border on funeral days. A corpse has in many lands for long been regarded as having evil magical power (known scientifically as *orenda* or *mana*) of an impersonal kind, latent in itself. In Ireland, for example, fishermen regarded it as unlucky to take the corpse of a drowned person into a boat. Also, *an fear gorta* ("the hungry grass"), which grew wherever a corpse touched the earth, had the power of causing all those who walked over the spot to be stricken with abnormal hunger. Many other instances of the evil power of a corpse might be cited. Just two hundred years ago, Morty Óg O'Sullivan, a native chieftain of Béara in West Cork, who had fought against the British both in Ireland and in many European countries as a member of the "Wild Geese", was slain outside his own house near Eyeries in Béara. The British took his body to a warship at Bere Island and dragged it through the sea in the wake of the ship about sixty miles to Cork. A poet who described this happening wrote the couplet:

*Ní raibh aon rath ar an uisce ó Chorcaigh go Béara
Ó tairngeadh tríd an bradáin gléigeal.¹*

No fish were said to have since been caught in the sea-route through which the corpse was dragged.

In Sweden, Miss LOUISE HAGBERG tells us, if a corpse were carried over cultivated ground or over lakes, they became thereby unfruitful, and crop-growing fields lost their vegetation. She also says that during the Middle Ages those persons over whose lands a corpse was carried unlawfully had the right to compensation; in Västergötland anybody who carried a corpse across the land of another, without the permission of the owner, rendered himself liable to a prescribed fine.

Thus, the funeral-boundary customs in the Cork-Kerry area, which have died out only in comparatively recent times, seem to fit into the wider pattern of custom and superstition devised to give protection against the magical evil power associated with corpses.

2. Wearing Clothes for the Dead

In the year 1918 or so, an uncle of mine died in the townland of Fehanagh, in the parish of Tuosist, in southwest Kerry. This is my native parish. Jerry Sullivan was my uncle's name; he died at the age of sixty-four. I was fifteen years old at the time, and was spending some weeks of my summer holidays at my uncle's when he became ill and died. I was allowed to remain in the house during the illness, wake, and funeral.

It is still the immemorial custom in that parish to get a suit of clothes specially made by a local tailor when a person dies. The suit is not worn by the corpse in the coffin. Still, it is intended

¹ There has been no luck on the water from Cork to Béara
Since the gleaming salmon was dragged through it.

CHAPTER XVIII

SOME CUSTOMS AND BELIEFS. I.

With the many material survivals from the past which 771
we have mentioned in earlier chapters there lives on an
imposing body of customs and superstitious beliefs of which
we can attempt to give no more than a summary description.
They concern not only the visible world with its common
elements and events—water, fire, stones, salt, iron, trees,
cattle, crops, harvest, food and drink, birth, marriage and
death—and the relics of former ages—raths or “forths,”
great stone monuments, stone axes, flint arrowheads, spinning
whorls and “crops of gold”—but also the unseen or rarely
glimpsed world of giants, fairies and other beings. All the
major processes of the farmer's year had their appropriate
magic rites which clung to them from the beginning. Many
of these superstitions are so deep-rooted that centuries of
opposition from the Christian Church have failed to suppress
them, and while it has driven some practices into secrecy it
has been forced to take others under its protection.

This applies, for instance, to the cult of holy wells, which 312
is, like the worship of stones and the veneration of thorn trees, 788
probably megalithic in origin and seems to carry us back to 755
the sunnier lands of the Mediterranean where the megalithic 778
religion took its rise. It has been calculated that there are
some 3,000 holy wells in Ireland: many of them are still
visited, generally at the festival seasons which we described
in the last chapter, and it is customary for the devotees to tie

312 strings of beads, rags or bits of clothing in the holy tree which
 788 often overhangs the well, so that it may bear their ailments.
 755 I happened to come across a well near Cork just after mid-
 778 summer this year. Alongside were the smouldering remains
 of a great bonfire which had been lit on St. John's Eve.
 The visitors to the well, having drunk the water, walked three
 times sunwise around the corbelled stone well-cover, and
 taking up pebbles kept ready to hand in crevices, they made
 the sign of the cross on certain stones which were marked with
 deep grooves which generations of patrons had cut by the
 same process. Some wells have old "cup-marks" instead
 of crosses, and it seems probable that these pagan symbols
 were made long ago in the same way as the crosses which
 have replaced them. Their round completed, the visitors
 [825] looked into the well, for if they were to recover from their
 ailments they would see the trout which is reputed to live
 there and to show itself only to the cured.

The virtues of these wells are many: they are believed to
 be efficacious in such varied complaints as eye-disease,
 lameness, toothache and in some cases barrenness. The first
 Sunday of each quarter of the Celtic year is generally the
 visiting time, but perhaps on account of the weather the
 summer festivals, and especially midsummer, are most
 popular. Pins and other bits of metal are sometimes deposited
 in wells. Offerings are also made to certain trees in the form
 of pins stuck in the bark, each pin representing a wish.
 Special gatherings known as patterns or pardons were held at
 such sites on the anniversary of the patron saint of the district.
 Devotions were followed by dancing and games which often
 degenerated into fights. It is possible to see relics of paganism
 in the sanctity of such sites, and it is worth recalling that
 some of the more celebrated centres of pilgrimage in western
 Europe, like Santiago da Compostella, seem to have mega-
 lithic connexions.

788 The mention of cup-marks brings us to the superstitions
 823 concerning the great stone monuments with which they are
 778 often associated. A recent article in the *Ulster Journal of*

Archaeology (July, 1940) by I. R. Crozier and L. C. Rea, 788
 entitled "Bullauns and other Basin-stones," summarizes the 823
 various beliefs connected with cup-holes and the larger 778
 "bullauns" or stone basins, which the authors suggest were
 made in the same way by gradual ceremonial attrition. The
 water which accumulates in these artificial hollows is con-
 sidered to possess special virtues, for instance as a cure for
 warts, and offerings of pins and coins are often made in them.
 It is significant that some of the basins seem to have served
 as fonts in the early churches. (Fig. III.) Small boulders 754
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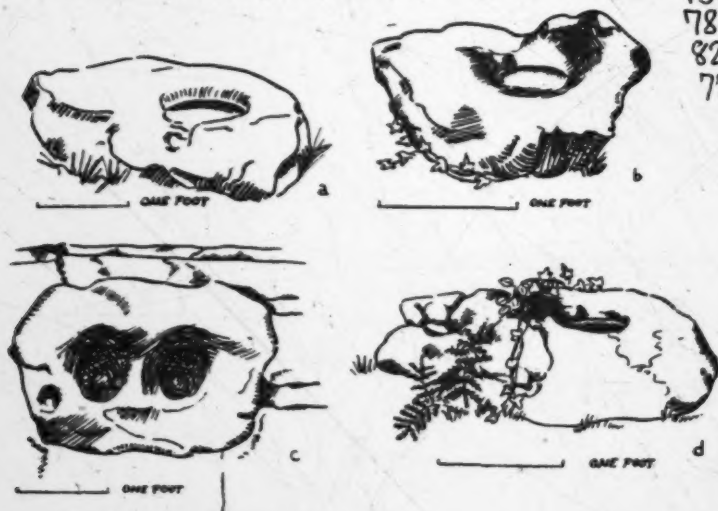


Fig. III. Bullauns.

(a) Portmore Church, Co. Antrim.

(b & d) Aghalee, Co. Antrim (basins on both sides of the same stone).

(c) "St. Columba's Font," Londonderry. (Two bullauns and a cup-mark.)

lying in certain basin-stones are occasionally employed as cursing stones, the ritual consisting of turning the stones against the sun in their holes—there may be as many as ten in one boulder—at the same time uttering a curse against the offending person.

788 offending person. Similar stones have been used to work
 823 beneficent magic in the case of expectant mothers. Here the
 778 symbolism may be that of the child in the womb, but there
 are other cases where it is obviously phallic. Sympathetic
 magic would appear to be the explanation of another custom,
 that of carrying away in a cloth and making into various
 concoctions, some of which were drunk, the earth from the
 [755] grave of a holy man. The drink was regarded as a cure for
 human sins or for disease in cattle.

829 The megaliths themselves are known to have been held in
 776 veneration as givers of fertility and curative agents. The
 [778] same virtues attach to certain solitary stones, for instance
 some holy wells have "healing stones" which are used to
 touch the affected parts of the body. Standing stones with
 a perforation ("holed-stones") are said to have been used in
 sealing marriage contracts. Megaliths are also considered the
 haunts of fairies, which, some students affirm, are to be
 regarded as ancestral spirits inhabiting the burial places and
 awaiting an opportunity to be born again. Alternatively it
 is thought that belief in fairies is a folk memory of ancient
 peoples of small stature. It is hardly necessary to say that
 belief in fairies is firmly held in many parts of the country:
 I have seen quite recently boys dressed in girls' clothes as a
 protection against fairy theft, for the "wee people" are
 liable to exchange their "changelings" for healthy boys—a
 [165] belief which is perhaps an attempt to explain the high
 mortality of male as compared with female children.

764 It has more than once been my experience to be refused
 [777] permission to excavate megalithic monuments from the
 owner's belief that bad luck would follow. Country people
 will not touch the trees that grow on ancient burial sites, for
 instance they will not even use fallen branches as fuel. This
 reluctance to interfere with the abodes of the dead provides a
 charitable explanation of the neglect from which many
 Christian burial grounds suffer. Incidentally it is worth
 [824] remarking that archaeologists have often shown by their
 discoveries that hazel wood and hazel nuts played a consider-

9: Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1942

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able part in the ceremonies of megalithic burial : we remember the significance attached to hazel nuts in the Hallowe'en games of divination (Chapter 17). 764
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The ancient raths or forths, earthen enclosures around old homesteads, are also favourite haunts of fairies, and many are the tales of mysterious happenings in their neighbourhood at night, and of signs of habitation and sweet music issuing from them. Protection from fairies is believed to be obtained by possession of a black-hafted knife, while oatmeal or oat-cakes are also specifics against their malign influence. From fairies as from witches the supreme hour of peril to mortals is at the eves of Beltane, Midsummer and All Hallows. Cattle afflicted with disease were believed to be "elf-shot"—the belief is entirely dead—and flint arrowheads were produced as evidence of the attack. The cure was to give the affected animal a drink of the water in which the arrow had been placed. Among other archæological relics the polished stone axes of the Neolithic and Bronze ages are known as thunderbolts and are accredited with healing powers, and the small spinning-whorls are termed fairy mill-stones. As Arthur Mitchell writes of Scotland: "It is believed that stone celts assist the birth of children; that they increase the milk of cows; that they cure the diseases of the eye; that they protect the houses in which they are kept from lightning; and that they have many other such marvellous virtues. It is believed that, as they have a sort of supernatural origin, they may reasonably be supposed to have supernatural powers." 776
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When food is taken out of doors it is a common belief that some must be left behind for the fairies, otherwise the dreaded "hungry grass" will grow; and the countryman will often spill a portion of his drink as a perhaps unconscious libation to the wee folk. Their activities are peculiarly dangerous to cattle and to butter-making. Among the charms designed to secure a good supply of butter in the churn we find the use of a horse-shoe, of a rusty nail from a coffin or the hand of a corpse, of rowan branches, salt, a live turf, or a cross made of Veronica leaves. 776
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[51]

BROWNE—*Ethnography of Inishbofin and Inishshark.* 359

or the influence of the evil-eye; and that she had been told by some of the people that they had seen little men, dressed in green, and headed by two others dressed in black, running over the hills. 776
[854]

In a recent Paper,¹ Professor A. C. Haddon gives the following:—
“In Innishbofin, Co. Galway, the people have a very firm belief in fairies. Mr. Allies, who resides there, informed me that one old man told him that he saw a number of fairy girls, dressed in brown, around him one day when he (Mr. Allies) was shooting rabbits. Mr. Allies offered £50 if a fairy could be shown to him, and £100 if he took a photograph of one. Mr. Allies has not yet paid away any money. Mr. Allies and his brother were quarrying a rock by the side of the harbour, and at last the men refused to work at it any longer, as it was so full of ‘good people’ as to be hot.”

It is remarkable that the leprachaun does not appear in any of the fairy tales of these islands, though the *fir dearg* figures largely in them.

1. *Customs*.—The old customs kept up here are said not to be numerous. Wakes and funeral observances have been already referred to (p. 352). Beltane-fires are lighted on St. John's Eve, round which the people gather, and, when the fire becomes low, they leap through the smoke over the embers. 372
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The custom of chasing the wren on St. Stephen's Day, so common throughout the greater part of Ireland, is said not to be known here. [184]

There are two holy wells on the islands, one, Tober Flannain, in the graveyard close to Tempull Colman, in the townland of Knock, is reputed to have worked many marvellous cures; and the other, Tober Leo, on Inishshark, not far from the cloghan of the saint, is also of great local fame. 312
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For the following note on Inishshark, I am indebted to Mr. Michael Lavelle:— 172

“There is yet shown a ruin called Cloghan Leo, in which he (St. Leo) is said to have dwelt; also fourteen stations, to each of which on certain days these people make a holiday, and pray there for the day. There is also a blessed well, called Thobar Leo, at which they pray; and after praying during the day, they go and sleep in the place mentioned above (Cloghan Leo), but it is now almost to the ground. 778

“On one of the stations is a granite stone which is hollowed out

¹ “A Batch of Irish Folk-Lore.” Professor A. C. Haddon, *Folk-Lore*, vol. iv., p. 49.

778 like a basin; it contains almost a gallon of water; it is curious how it came there, for there is not a pebble of granite here."

527 The people of the same island keep as a special holiday the 11th of April, St. Leo's day, and will not do any work on it, while the inhabitants of Inishbofin do not observe it at all.

773 2. *Legends and Traditions.*—There are many legends and traditional tales about places on the islands, of which the few which could be collected are given below; the main outlines only, in which all versions agree, are related, as each story was heard from more than one person, and the versions differed in detail.

823 *Lough Bofin (The Lake of the White Cow).*—A very long time ago, so long that nobody knows exactly when, Inishshark was a well-known island, and was inhabited; but Inishbofin was unknown, as, owing to enchantment, it was invisible. One day two fishermen were lost in a dense fog, and drifted on until they found themselves beside a rock, on which they landed and made a fire.¹ As soon as the fire touched the rock, the fog suddenly lifted, and the men found themselves on the shingly beach (now called the North Beach) of a strange island; on one side of the shingly belt on which they were was the sea, and on the other a lough, and close to them was an old woman driving a white cow down to the water. She drove the cow into the lake, and struck her with a stick, when she was at once turned into a rock. One of the fishermen, who had followed out of curiosity, was very angry at what he saw, and in his rage he struck the woman, and at once both he and she were transformed into stones. The rock and stones may be seen there still. The cow used to rise up out of the lake, and walk about the island when any great event was about to happen, but it is now more than thirty years since she was last seen. It is from this cow that the island takes its name (Inis bo-finne).

173 *Carrig Guairim.*—An old chief of the islands named Guairim (or Gorham), whose castle was situated just above Bofin harbour, had a dispute with the monks of St. Colman's Abbey about the payment of tithe, and, not content with not paying, he, with the assistance of a family named Halligan, took the settlement of the dispute into his own hands by seizing six of the monks, whom he slew by the roadside in Middlequarter, at a spot where their blood is said to be seen still on the anniversaries of the murder. Gorham did not escape unpunished for this bloodthirsty act; he was taken over to Rinivyle

[276] ¹ Another version is—"One of them knocked the ashes out of his pipe, for they had pipes then, though we do not know what they used to smoke in them."

173 began to sink.¹ Suspecting that the bell was the cause of their misfortune, they threw it into the sea, and the ship was saved. Next morning, when some of the islanders were searching for sea-weed on the shore, they found the bell lying broken among the rocks. This relic has long ago disappeared, having been cut up into pieces which were worn as amulets, most of which have been taken to America, but it is said that some are still kept as great treasures by some old people in Inishbofin, who refuse to show them to anyone.

● [178]

Richard O'Flaherty, writing in 1684, makes mention of this bell ("H-Iar Connaught," p. 117) . . . "Inisark is of the same property with Bofin and the saint therein worshipped, St. Leo; of whose reliques is a bell there extant."

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St. Leo's Foot-print.—There is pointed out an impression in the rock on which Cloghan Leo is built, which is said to be the imprint of the saint's foot, and the people's explanation of how it came there is, that when he had finished building the cloghan he had to leap down, as he had no ladder, and alighting on the rock he left the print of his foot upon it, where it still remains.

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There is a tradition on the islands of a large treasure of gold being hidden on Davillaun (a small island of the Bofin group), on which a large vessel of the Spanish Armada was wrecked, and some of the people claim to know exactly where it is. There are also many stories about Lord Nelson, under whom several men from these islands served, and wild tales of the old smugglers; and a very narrow passage between two dangerous rocks through which a daring smuggler once steered his vessel, and thus baffled his pursurers, is pointed out.

ARCHÆOLOGY.

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Though making no pretensions to being an archæologist, yet as an inquiry of this sort would be imperfect without, at least, a partial description of the antiquities of the place, I hope that the notes hereunder given may, in some degree at least, supply the want.

1. *Survivals.*—In these the locality is comparatively rich, a good many old implements and methods of working, which have become extinct in other places, being still common. Such are the continuance of the use of plants and lichens as dyes, and some details of dress, such as the old blue cap, &c., which have been referred to before.

¹One version of the story states that the ship had got as far as the Bay of Biscay:

832 believed in, or at least spoken of, though not practised. It is called the spancel, and is thus described by C. O.¹:—"This spancel, called in Irish 'stheiol dhrum agus tharragh,' signifying the skin of the back and of the belly, consists of a continuous band of skin taken from round the length of the body, viz. from the side of one foot up the outside of that leg and side, over the head and down the other side to the sole of the other foot, up the inside of that leg and down the inside of the other, until the stripe meets where it first set out; it is used as a love charm, and its power is believed to be irresistible, it being only necessary in order to secure the affections of the victim, to tie the spancel round him while asleep; if he does not awake during the operation all *must* turn out to the wish of the operator; if he does awake, he dies before the end of the year, so the poor desired one has no escape." The same author mentions several instances of this, which were said to have occurred shortly before he wrote (1841), one of which, the discovery of three young women taking the spancel off a corpse, is still remembered by some of the older inhabitants. There are several holy wells in the district, but the most famous is the well of St. Brendan, on Inishglora, the water of which is said to remain sweet and pure if drawn by a man, but to turn bloody and become 312 778 823 full of worms if a woman has the temerity to take it. Many tales are told of the misfortunes which have happened to women who persisted in drawing water from this well after being warned. There is now resident in Belmullet an old man who lived for some years on Inishglora. This man solemnly declared to the Rev. P. O'Reilly and the writer that he had three times cleared out the well after women had taken water from it, and that on each occasion it was "full of blood and corruption"; he also said that from the time he began to clean out the well until the job was completed no water flowed in, though it began to come as soon as the cleansing was finished. He added that if a woman were left alone on the island with only a male child of a month old, and she wanted to get water, the vessel would have to be held by the child's hand to prevent the water from becoming bloody.

[753] 2. *Charms and Leechcraft*.—Disease is often ascribed to supernatural agencies, and for this reason is often treated by charms or incantations. There are several local "wise" men and women who 755 treat disorders partly by means of charms, partly by herbal and animal remedies. In some cases the idea underlying the treatment

¹ "Eriss and Tyrawley," p. 90.

173 'deed of old' to delighted listening ears, but in language so ancient as to be now almost unintelligible to most Irish speakers of the modern school." The tradition of St. Brendan's discovery of America is well known, but the statement made by old writers about the supposed anti-putrefactive nature of the soil of Inishglora, does not seem to be recognised by the people of the district, who point to the bones among the ruins in disproof of the story.

539 O'Flaherty, in his "Ogygia," mentions the island in the following lines:—

"In Innishglora on Erris shore,
Should we the bodies of our sires explore
We'd find them blooming, fresh and fair,
No human flesh can rot or perish there."

173 *The Priest's Leap.*—Just below the sea face of Dunnamoe, and
823 separated from it by a narrow channel, is a large rock, which, tradition relates, was once part of the cliff on which the fort is built. It is said that once in the old times, some say the time of Cromwell, a priest was saying Mass at Tarmoncarra, when he was surprised by the soldiery. Not knowing whither to fly, he ran towards the cliffs and reached them at this spot, his pursuers coming close behind him. Just when all seemed lost the large mass of rock on which he was broke away from the cliff and settled down in the sea as an islet, bearing down the priest with it, comfortably seated, in a niche, known as the "priest's chair," sheltered from the bullets of his enemies. Thus protected he remained until night, when he was taken off in a curragh by his people. The place has since been known as the "Priest's Leap."

● 778 *The Namhoge or Neewoge.*—There was formerly on Iniskea a small stone figure called the *neewoge* (little saint), which was believed to have great power over the weather, and was accordingly treated with great reverence and used to be invoked for favourable winds. It is said that a pirate landed on the island, and after carrying off all that was portable, set fire to the houses, with the exception of the one in which the *neewoge* was kept, which did not take fire. Search was made for the cause and the image was taken out and broken. The *neewoge* was not fully recovered this treatment. His power, though still great, was not the same as it had been.

Some years ago the attention of the parish priest became directed to the existence of this image, and having obtained the stone by a stratagem from the woman who was its custodian he threw it into the sea. As he died not very long after this, some of the islanders ascribe

BROWNE—*Ethnography of the Mullet, Inishkea, & Portacloy*. 639

his death to his interference with this figure. An Inishkea man spoke about the matter with much indignation even after the lapse of years, and said that they had never known misfortune or hunger in the island until after the destruction of this *newcoge*. 778

Many different accounts have been given of the image itself. One writer (C. O.) states that it was a stone figure of rude workmanship, and that it was dressed in a suit of homespun, renewed every year.

The description given by those who have seen it agree in stating that it was not a statue but a small flat stone. One informant believed it to be part of the head of a stone figure. This was enveloped in a small bag of homespun, which was replaced when it got old and soiled, and was kept in a blind window or recess in the wall in one of the houses.

St. Brendan and the Devil.—During my visit to Inishglora some of the Inishkea fishermen, who were camped there at the time, pointed out that no grass grew on a part of the island, and gave the following explanation:—St. Brendan was one day disturbed in his devotions by the devil, who appeared to him in the form of a beautiful girl and tempted him. The saint indignantly repulsed the temptress, and drove her towards the end of the island, blessing the soil as he went, but at the point where the grass ends, Satan changed his form and assumed the shape of a ram, which so astonished the saint that in his excitement he ceased blessing and gave chase to the evil one who ran to the rocks and jumped into the sea. The unblessed land is that on which the grass does not grow. 776

VI. ARCHAEOLOGY.

The few notes made in this section do not purport to be fully descriptive, but merely to indicate the nature of the antiquities of the region, which are of importance in the study of the people as bearing on the history of their past, and to direct the attention of archaeologists to the quantity of material worthy of study and record which is still to be met with in this part of county Mayo. 172 178

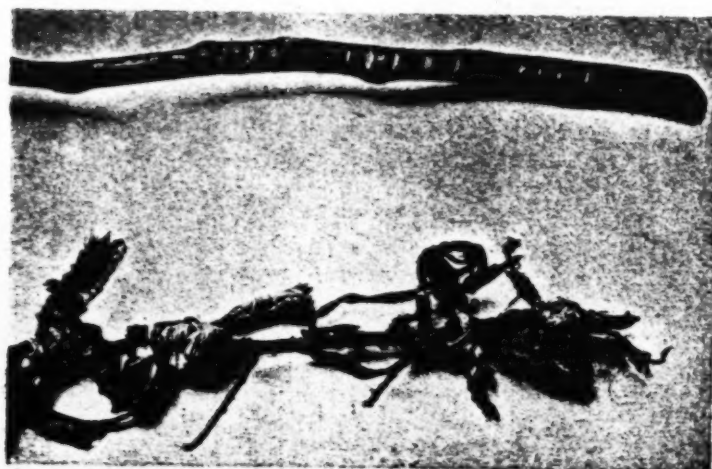
1. *Survivals*.—The district is comparatively rich in these, though many articles in use in the localities previously reported on are now quite extinct in Erris. The primitive condition of many of the houses, the absence of chimneys, and the custom of taking cattle into the dwellings have already been referred to. 178

The quern is still in use in several houses, especially on the islands and in the remoter localities, though now only employed for 412



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1. Holystone "altar", Inishkeel, Co. Donegal.



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[211]

2. Above, Pilgrim's prayer-tally, Gouganebarra, Co. Cork.

Below, Rags on bramble at a wart-well.

[facing p.208]

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
ER6 Rural Irish ER6

PLATE 16

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Holy well at Doon, Co. Donegal. Crutches and bushes (*behind*) swathed in rags.

[Fnc103 P.209]

FAIRS AND GATHERINGS



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1 in

FIG. 84. Portable crucifix ('penal cross'). Found at Hilltown, Co. Down.

dancing, shouting, fiddling, courting, drinking and fighting'.¹ 796
In some celebrated instances the holy wells are associated [786]
with lakes and islands, for example Gouganebarra at the source 788
of the River Lee, and the most famous of all Irish pilgrimages 778 ●

¹Mr. and Mrs. S. C. Hall, *Ireland: Its Scenery, Character Etc.*, 1, 281.

FAIRS AND GATHERINGS

788 is that of St. Patrick's Purgatory, on a small island in Lough
 ● 778 Derg in Donegal. Still a powerful attraction, it has been maintained since the early middle ages and has been described, with piety or derision, by innumerable writers since one of the earliest accounts was written by Giraldus Cambrensis, about 1185. The pilgrimage became very popular in the early nineteenth century, when the numbers of visitors are said to have averaged 10,000 annually. Mr. A. T. Lucas has shown that this pilgrimage resulted in the distribution through the country of certain portable wooden crucifixes popularly known as penal crosses.¹ Carved from the solid in a characteristic style, they bear dates between 1700 and 1830 (Fig. 84). It seems that they were sold to pilgrims at Lough Derg and taken home as souvenirs after being used in the devotional ritual. They were a local development, no doubt initiated by some peasant wood-carver, of simple crosses, consisting merely of two sticks tied together, such as are still made at some patterns and occasionally at the festivals of St. Briget and All-Hallows. In this way, as in sanctifying the gatherings themselves, Christianity has taken over the symbols and strength of the elder faiths.

The pilgrimage of Croagh Patrick, in Co. Mayo, is the most celebrated of those held at the end of July, involving the ascent of high mountains and marking, by tradition, the close of summer and the beginning of harvest, as discussed in the following chapter. Here we may quote once more the *Parliamentary Gazetteer* for 1845: 'No place in Ireland is the scene of more superstitious observances, or a more popular resort of pilgrims and devotees, or the site of more numerous small memorials of superstition, or the subject of more generally credited legends of hagiology. Vast crowds of miserable human beings . . . swarm all over its summit and sides and skirts; one grand current legend is almost everywhere believed in the teeth of all credulity, that St. Patrick gathered hither, and swept hence all venomous creatures in Ireland.'

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¹A. T. Lucas, *Co. Louth Arch. Journ.*, 13 (1954), 145-74.

FIXED FESTIVALS

- 527 Christianized, cling to the preparations made on St. Briget's Eve, the last day of January. On that day rushes are fashioned into protective charms known as Briget's Crosses, a name which illustrates how the church has won over pagan symbols, 527
 ● 778 for the 'crosses' take the form of either swastikas or lozenges, and comparative evidence suggests that they are magic symbols of suns or eyes (Fig. 85). A three-legged swastika, presumably an old form, is reserved for use in the byre: its shape may be compared with the Celtic triskele. The lozenge-shaped charms have their counterparts in many parts of the world. The Huichols of Mexico make similar charms of wool mounted on a bamboo frame: known as a 'god-eyes', they bring good health and long life to children.¹ A Californian Indian charm made of grass or rushes is very similar. In the Old World similar magic [171] 'squares' have a wide distribution, in Europe, Africa, Tibet, Burma, Assam and Indonesia, and farther afield in Melanesia, Polynesia and Australia. Among the Nagas of Assam the squares, made of coloured thread, are placed on the graves of women and protect them against evil spirits.² In Sweden and Estonia straw squares are strung up as Christmas decorations and tied to the straw masks worn during Christmas games (Fig. 85).

Briget's Crosses are believed to protect the house and the livestock from harm and from fire. No evil spirit could pass the charm, which was therefore hung above the door of house and byre. The rushes must be pulled, not cut, on St. Briget's Eve, and care must be taken to fashion the crosses from left to right, with the sun. As a rule they are left in position until replaced the following year, though I have seen byres with many crosses thrust into the underthatch, the decaying accumulation of annual offerings. In Co. Galway similar crosses made of wood or straw were also placed in the rafters at Hallowe'en, and the discovery of a partly burnt rush cross which had been deposited in a megalith in Co. Limerick points to a more general cult of the 'cross'.³ A 'love-knot' of similar shape, fashioned out of sedge leaves, is known from South Wales.

¹F. Toor, *A Treasury of Mexican Folkways* (1947), 72.

²H. E. Kauffmann, *J.R.A.I.*, 73 (1943), 101, 106.

³S. P. O'Riordain, *North Munster Antiquarian Journal*, 1 (1936), 36. For a study of Briget's Crosses in Co. Armagh, see T. G. F. Paterson, *U.J.A.*, 8 (1945), 43-48.

13:Evans K-5 (ca. 1940) 1957
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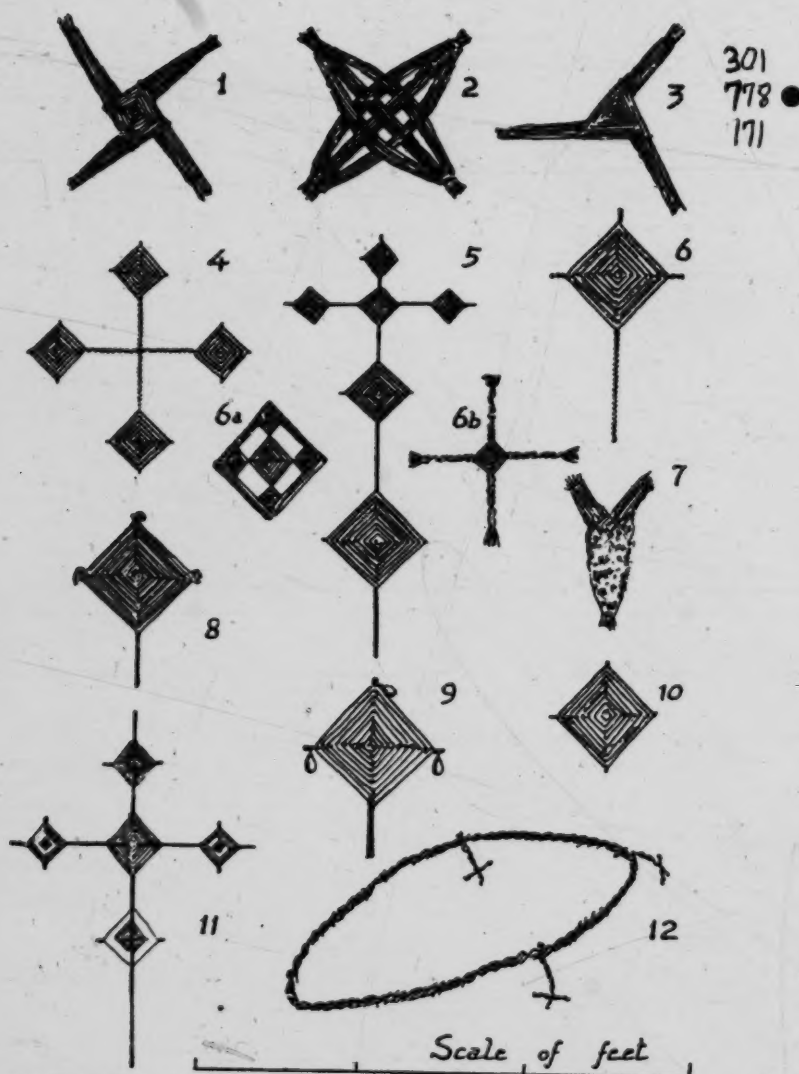


FIG 86. Briget's Crosses and charms. (1-7) all made of rushes, are from Co. Armagh (in County Museum, Armagh). (8) is a Naga thread-square (after Kauffmann). (9) is a Wailaki charm of rushes (after Kroeber, *Handbook of the Indians of California*). (10) is an Estonian straw-square, worn as decoration on straw hats at Christmas (see Fig. 88, 5). (11) is a Mexican 'God-eyes' made of woven wool (after Toor). (12) is a Briget's Girdle (in National Museum, Dublin).

OLD PISHROGUES

824 known instances when a branch accidentally broken from a fairy thorn was carefully tied back in position.

797 The policy of the Church was to attach new myths to old
312 rites, but only occasionally has the thorn tree been nominally
778 won over to Christianity by dedication to local saints or by its
association with sacred sites, with wells or Lammass celebrations, as for example the Criocan Thorn in the heart of Slieve Bloom.¹ On the other hand well-worship has had less stubborn roots, and 'holy water' has been more readily absorbed into Christian ritual. Nearly all the holy wells have close associations with the saints. Over 3,000 examples have been listed, most of them now half forgotten, others visited in secret and a declining number openly resorted to for cures. It is not difficult to understand the universal attraction of a spring of pure water. In the eyes of countryfolk a sense of mystery attaches to the upwelling of a spring well: it is considered lucky to have access to such a source of domestic water—a true 'well', not a hole bored in the ground—and one is invariably told that the local well yields the purest water for miles around, or even 'in all Ireland'. The attributes of purification, healing and fertility are natural concomitants of the magic welling of spring water, but besides possessing supernatural powers of this kind the holy wells are regarded as having had miraculous origins. The most famous sites where patterns are held have already been mentioned: the local holy well is rather an ever-present source of healing resorted to in need. One cannot but think of an ancient cult of waters springing from deep sources in primitive religion which was reinforced and adapted by successive intrusive cultures from the megalithic to the Christian (Pl. 16).

312 The ritual of 'paying rounds' at a well frequently involves
778 associated stones and trees. A sunwise circuit of the well is
788 made and the pilgrim, after taking a drink from the well, hangs a rag or a rosary on an adjacent bush. The ritual commonly includes also tracing with a pebble on a stone of the well-covering the mark of a cross which has been incised by countless other pebbles. This practice has a bearing on the mysterious cup-marked stones and basin-stones (bullauns) which are associated with numerous ritual sites, including wells, for I

¹V. Cornish, *Historic Thorn Trees in the British Isles*, 53.

OLD PISHROGUES

believe that many examples were ground out in much the same way before the sign of the cross replaced that of the circle. Cup-marked stones are commonly found in megalithic graves, on standing stones and Bronze Age cists, both in the British Isles and further afield. Some of the larger bullauns were certainly mortars, and very similar 'knocking stones' were used until recent times for preparing barley meal by pounding the grain with a beetle or maul (Fig. 90). To judge from the frequency with which one finds a knocking stone in the ruins of an old clachan it was one of the communal possessions of such a settlement. Old specimens, more especially when the basins are sunk in an outcrop of rock, are frequently found to hold water, and they are then regarded as 'wells', the water being held efficacious as a cure for warts. That such rock-basins have magic powers is illustrated by the following reference to a site in Scotland. On the Loch Avon side of Cairngorm is a shelving rock bearing hand-made basins about a foot wide and correspondingly deep: 'sitting on them is said to be efficacious in cases of barrenness.'¹



FIG. 90. Knocking stone and bullaun. Both Co. Antrim.

It is an interesting illustration of the pagan associations of cup-marks, and of the success of the symbol of the cross, that their use survived in folk practice only as cursing stones. Smooth pebbles resting in certain stone basins are turned three times against the sun. There are many examples in the west, some

¹A. Mitchell, *The Past in the Present*, 265.

OLD PISHROGUES

526 perfect sphere the rounded igneous pebbles which are selected for the purpose. One wonders whether some of the many cup-marked stones which turn up in the fields in certain districts—I have seen many in Inishowen in Donegal—were used for shaping stones, such as the sling-stones with which champion slingers, of whom the legendary Cuchulainn was one, performed their feats. The sling and the sling-rod were originally hunting weapons and probably instruments of war, and one of the last refuges of slinging as a pastime was the now vanished Claddagh, the fishing suburb of Galway, where a man was not reckoned a good shot until he could strike a shilling as far away as it could be seen.¹

312 Where a holy well has dried up—the usual explanation is that
824 it was desecrated and moved its position—the sanctity of the
778 site may be transferred to a tree. The so-called pin-well at Arboe in Co. Tyrone is a beech tree, hirsute with pins and nails, growing in the burying ground on a Celtic monastic site. A rag-well at Clonmel is visited by mountain farmers who hang rag offerings on briars at lambing and calving times, and afterwards place more rags appropriate in number to the increase obtained.² There is on the island of Inishmurray a wind-

[821] well which has the power of controlling the wind, the ritual being to empty the well to produce a calm. Sticks and stones also
789 figure in wind-raising ceremonies, and 'the rude stone image of
778 Inniskea' (Inishkea in Co. Mayo), which was dressed up in flannel each New Year's Day, had powers of producing either storm or calm.³ Powerful magic was worked by a wooden statue of St. Macdara, formerly kept in his chapel—an oratory of early type with projecting *antae*—on an island dedicated to the saint in the extreme south-western corner of Co. Galway. Sailors passing the island dipped their sails three times in honour of the image, but we are left to guess what superstitions were involved from the statement that about the year 1640 'the bishop of Tuam caused it to be buried for weighty reasons'.⁴

¹U.J.A., 2 (1854), 164.²Béaloideas, 15 (1945), 284.³C. Otway, *Erri and Tyrawly*, 107.⁴C. R. Browne, *Carna and Mtuernish*.

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important subject somewhat bald. The pagan Irish, of course, 823
reverenced wells, and the famous "King of the Waters" in Mayo
was connected with St. Patrick by early biographers.⁹ With the [797]
usual wise tactfulness of the ancient Irish missionaries all that was
harmless was adopted into the new religion, and the wells lost
none of their old observances and honour. The dedications of 796
the Clare wells form a most valuable record, for, even when the 823
founder of the church was forgotten, or a new patron invoked, the 778
well usually kept the name of the ancient local saint. Unfortunately since about 1850 names of wells have been locally
forgotten, and a re-dedication, often to St. Joseph, is common.
Strange to say, the noteworthy saints Enda and Luchtighern are
forgotten at the wells at their churches. The early mediæval
life of St. Senan, (Colgan, *Vita S.S.*, March), says that, when that
saint was born at Magh Lacha, Moylough, there was no water at
hand to baptize him,—a rare thing in County Clare,—so he told
his mother to pull up three rushes, and a spring welled out. The
tale was still told in 1816.¹⁰ The life of St. Mochulleus (Mochuille
or Mochulla), about 1141 tells us how that early seventh-century
saint struck a rock near a lake to the north of Tulla and three streams
broke out. The well dedicated to him to the east of Loch Grane
is evidently intended, and *two* streams still flow from it down the
hillside. Some have supposed the wells of Tobereendowny, ("well
of the King of the Sabbath," or, as suggested by Prof. Macalister
and others, "of the world"),—were dedicated to a pre-Christian
deity. Tobereevul is dedicated to Aibhill.¹¹ The flooded dolmen,
Tobergrania, is named from Finn's fugitive spouse, "Granny's
bed" occurring also as a dolmen name in Clare. Among
Christian dedications we have Tobercruhuorindowan (of "the
creator of the world") at Killard, Tober Isa (of "Jesus"), and
Tobernacrohynave (i.e. Tobar-na-croiche-naoimh, of "the Holy
Cross"). To the Virgin are dedicated wells at Drimelihi-
Westby, Kilmacduan, and Killadysert. Of non-local saints,—
usually, it is probable, late dedications,—we find St. John has

⁹ E.g., in the *Tripartite Life*, ed. W. Stokes, among the early "annota-
tions" of Tirechan.

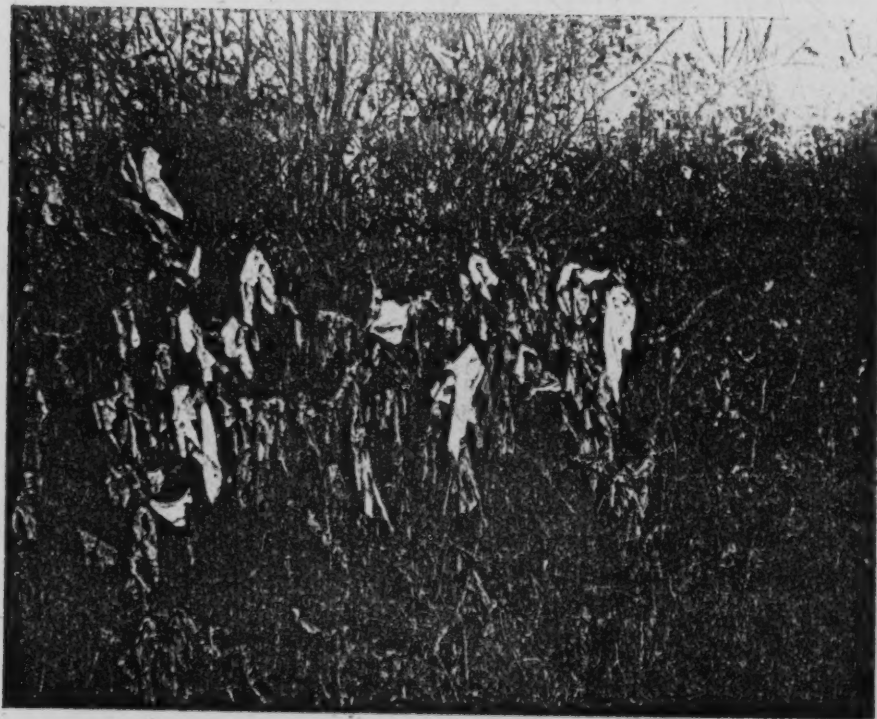
¹⁰ Mason's *Parochial Survey*, vol. ii., under Kilrush Parish.

¹¹ Cf. vol. xxi., p. 186.

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Plate X.



ST. SENAN'S TREE WITH RAG OFFERINGS, KILTINANLEA.

To face p. 210. [P.231]

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[Facing p. 231]

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776 the wells of Killone and Tromra, St. Michael wells at Kilbrecan, Cappagh (Bunratty) and the Kilmihils, St. Augustine at Kilshanny and Gallynagry, St. Bartholomew at Toberpartholaun in Rath (Inchiquin), and St. Martin at Moyarta, Ballynecally, and Lemaneagh. All the dedications to St. Joseph are modern. St. Patrick did not enter Clare, but has wells at Correen (Kilnaboy), Clooney (Bunratty Barony), and Rossalia. The following list of wells dedicated to local saints may be useful for reference. *Brecan* (c. 480) has wells at Noughaval near Clare Castle (Kilbrecan), Doora, and Clooney (Bunratty); *Brendan* (date doubtful), at Kilmoon and Farighy (Moyarta); *Brigid*, (probably the Abbess of Feenish Island, c. 550), Kiltanon, Cappafeeaun, Finnor, and Coney Island; *Caimin* (d. 653), Iniscaltra and Moynoe; *Caritan* (c. 550), Kilcredaun in Kilballyowen, Kilcredaun near O'Brien's Bridge, and Kilcredaunadober near Bunratty; *Carrol* (doubtful), Kilcarrol, where a wooden image of him existed in 1816; *Colan* of Tomgraney (d. 552), to the west of that village; *Colman mac Duach* of Kilmacduach (c. 630), Kinallia, Oughtmama (where "the three Colmans" probably originate in a confusion of texts), Teernea, Lough George, and Crusheen: *Columba* of Iona (d. 597), Crumlin and Glen Columbcille; *Cornan* (unknown), Kilcornan and Tobercornan in Gleninagh; *Croine* (unknown), Kilcrony and Lisrona in Moyarta, *Cronan* (probably of Tomgraney, c. 505), Inchicronan, Ternacronan, Killokenedy, and Corrakyle; *Dioma*, Kildimo; *Erda* (c. 480), Killeany; *Fachtan* (doubtful), Kille-nora; *Flannan* (c. 680), Killaloe; *Imer* (unknown), Killimer; *Inghéan Baoith* (c. 630), Kilnaboy, Commons, Glenseeade, Inakerstown, Killavella, Dulick (Templemaley), Kiltacky, Kilshanny, Aglish, Moy-Ibrickan, Magowna, Ballycoree, Shalee (two), Cullaun, Castletown (Spansil Hill), Dromumna, and Quin; *Kirin* (not Kieran), Kilkierin (locally Kilkereen); *Lachtin*, Kilnamona, Kilfarboy, and Stacpoole Bridge near Miltown Malbay; *Lonan* (c. 580), Killaspuglonane and Derrynavahagh (Kilmoon); *Luchtighern* (c. 550), Tomfinlough and, probably, Moy Ibrickan; *Macreehy* (c. 580), Kilmacreehy, Kilmanaheen, and Inagh; *Mainchin* (perhaps "St. Munchin," patron of Limerick), Kilmanaheen; *Mochonna* (unknown), Feakle and Moynoe; *Mochulla* (c. 630), Tulla, Templemoculla (Clonlara), Lough Graney, Lough

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Breeda, Miltown, Kilgorey, Fortanne, Broadford, Trough, Ralahine, Cragg, Lahardan, and Cappavilla, with perhaps, (if not of St. Molocus, c. 550), Moylough, Scatterry, and Carrigaholt; *Molua* (c. 620), Killaloe; *Onchu*, Killonaghan; *Sanctan*, Dromline; *Screbann*, Clondegad and Kilmaley; *Senan* (d. 552), Iniscatha, Moylough, Iniscaeragh (Mutton Island), Kilclogher, Carrow (Kilmaduan), Erribul (Kilfiddan), Kilshanny, Killaneena, Cooraclare, Kilcredaun, and Drim (Quin); *Tola* (c. 635), Dysert O'Dea and Kiltola; and *Voydan* or *Braighdean* (unknown), Kilvoydan, Corofin, and Kilraughtis.

Healing Powers.—The *Ordnance Survey Letters*¹² mention the following:—Gleninagh well, which has a fifteenth-century well-house or "turry," cured sore eyes; Tober Cholmain, above Oughtmama churches, sufferers from "the pearl," the films falling off the eyes at the third washing; St. Maccreehy's well, near Liscannor, eye troubles, which were also cured by St. Inghean Baoith's well near Kilshanny (even then nearly deserted), Tobermoghna near Clooney (Corcomroe), St. Senan's well on the cliffs south-west from Kilkee, Kilcrony well near Carrigaholt, Tobercuan in Kiltrellig near Loop Head, Tobershenan in Moyfadda, the Virgin's well at Templemaley, and Tober Isa at Corlack Glebe (Bunratty). Tobernatasha, ("well of the relic" or, as some say, "spectre"), in Kilmaley was shaped like a coffin, and delicate children used to be laid on their backs in it.¹³ The black mud which gave its name to Toberduff cured sore eyes and swelled limbs. So did Senan's well at Kilkee; horrible to tell, the devotees,—down to 1875, at least, when a washing-tank was made outside the well-house,—used to wash in this, the only supply of drinking-water for the then fashionable watering-place. Toberlachtin at Kilnemona cured several diseases, its "day" being March 19th. Eyes were also healed by the well south from Newmarket-on-Fergus, and by the wetted moss of St. Mochulla's well near Tulla (the moss being put back to complete the cure). The latter well is said to have avenged itself, about 1780, on its landlord, who had dug away part of its enclosure, by rendering

¹² Library of the Royal Irish Academy, Mss. 148 23. 24, (Co. Clare), vols. I. and II.

¹³ *Ordnance Survey Letters*, (Co. Clare), vol. I., p. 183.

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his son and daughter imbecile. The son survived till 1853, and no other members of the family were affected after the well was restored.¹⁴ The Newmarket well indignantly removed itself to its present site when "a dirty woman washed her feet in it," and it also gave her the complaint it usually cured. So, also, when the holy well above Oughtmama¹⁵ was offended, it closed, and broke out lower down the hillside, as the Sruhaunanaeve or "saints' stream," and the water of Killone well refused to boil. The Cunninghams, living near it, spoilt their cooking by using its water, though "they knew it would not boil." John Windele tells of other resentful wells in Cork and Kerry; for example, the well at Labba Molagga (Cork) ran dry when a woman washed her clothes in it, and at Maunaholtora the well near a dolmen ran dry, and its water refused to boil.¹⁶ The Irish "Nennius" tells a story of ducks that could not be boiled because the water would not get hot while they were in it. In the last century a woman who drew water from a well and saw it did not boil found a fish in it. She took the fish back to the well, and the water then boiled without any difficulty. The mud of the dolmen or "well" of Tobergranian at Ballycroum cured sore or short-sighted eyes, and that of the bullaun or basin at Kiltinanlea church near Clonlara did the same. The well of St. Michael at Kilmihil was once powerful. Father Anthony Bruodin, a Franciscan and author of a history of his order¹⁷ full of curious particulars about Clare before 1640, tells how "Lady" Mariana, wife of Thomas MacGorman, of the author's kinsfolk, had in 1632 long suffered from gout. The Archangel appeared to her in a dream, and bade her go to his church and dig where she should see rushes growing near it. Aided by her son and Dermot O'Quaely, the parish priest of Kilmihil, she found the well and was cured. Many other persons got similar relief, but there seems no tradition of any cures by it preserved among the people of Kilmihil.

Offerings.—It is right, on visiting a well, to make offerings of

¹⁴ So Mrs. Connors at Fortanne.

¹⁵ Pronounced Ought-máw-má. It is a weird spot with three ancient churches in a grassy basin on the flank of a terraced hill of bare grey limestone.

¹⁶ Windele, *Mss. Royal Irish Academy*; Borlase, *Dolmens of Ireland*, vol. iii., pp. 765-9.

¹⁷ *Propugnaculum Catholicae Fidei*, 1665.

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small objects, only of value as homage. Rag offerings are naturally most frequent where there is a "blessed bush" at the well, but they are frequently hung on a bramble, or even, on the Atlantic coast, kept in place by stones. Rags abounded, with other offerings, at Gleninagh, at least till 1899, being tied to the twigs of an old elder bush. They were hung in quantities on the stunted old hawthorn at Oughtmama well, and were found at Tobersraheen, at Aglish graveyard in Ogonello, and on the large fallen hawthorn near the basin at Kiltinanlea. They are often accompanied by rosaries, religious medals, necklaces and ribbons, broken or whole plaster and china figures and vessels, and glass, buttons, pins, and nails. Such objects are abundant at many wells, such as the little rock well in Glensleade between the largest Berneens dolmen and the road, Killone altar, St. Senan's well near Kiltinanlea (Plate XI.), Fortanne, Kilseily, St. Lachtin's well near Milltown Malbay, Kilcredaun, and a well of St. Inghean Baoith (stopped by a too zealous Protestant, but recently reopened and dedicated to St. Joseph) near Inchiquin lake. The almost disused dolmen-well of Tobergrania had in 1893 two rude crosses of laths tied together, buttons, bottles, glass, crockery, and a coin.¹⁸ In 1889 Kilfarboy well near Milltown was frequented on Sundays and Thursdays by sick persons, and abounded in such offerings as bits of leather, crockery, and blacking pots. (I am not certain whether this note refers to St. Lachtin's well or to one near Kilfarboy church.) China and pebbles have been offered at Kilcredaun in a cleft beside the Shannon estuary, and pebbles placed in the "Font" of Doughnambraher in central Clare.¹⁹

THOS. J. WESTROPP.

(To be continued.)

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XVII. *Religious Objects and their Legends.*

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538 Clare was once rich in religious objects, and some important ones have survived until our times, such as the Bell Shrine of St. Senan, the croziers of St. Blathmac of Rath and St. Tola of Dysert O'Dea, and the bells of Rath, Burren, and Kilshanny,—all, except the last, in the collection of the Royal Irish Academy in Dublin, besides the reputed bell of Iniscatha.¹⁴ St. Colman MacDuach and St. Lachtin were also closely connected with the county, and the crozier of the first and shrine of the arm of the second are preserved in the Irish collection. We read in early records how the Norse, in their destruction of the monastery of Iniscaltra in 922, "drowned its relics and shrines" in Lough Derg. The early *Life of St. Senan* tells how his bell descended ringing from heaven, and the place where this is reputed to have happened is still shown at Cross, between Kildimo and Farighy. The richly-enshrined crozier of St. Flannan of Killaloe (c. 680), and the bell brought from Rome by St. MacCreehy (c. 620), were extant when their *Lives* were written in the middle of the twelfth century. Early in the seventh century "the relics of Columb, son of Crimthann, were brought in a wain" to Caimin of Iniscaltra.¹⁵ There were a number of relics and a bell "gold-enshrined" at Tulla in 1318.¹⁶ Recent legend tells of the bells of the round towers of Dromcliff and Kilnaboy being hidden in the pool of Poulaclog and the marsh below the latter monastery, and of a silver bell of Kilmoon or Killeany, in the Burren, hidden in the stream named from it Owennaclugga. A brass bell found in the round tower of Dysert was sold in Limerick about 1837. The Black Bell of the MacNamaras was probably one of the relics at Tulla, and may be the one attributed to St. Mochulla in 1141. The "Black Book" of that saint was probably a register, and existed down to 1627, when it was used (and disappeared) in a lawsuit

¹⁴ It was exhibited in Dublin in 1853 by a Mr. John Cooke, and sold to the British Museum. There is no local tradition attached to it.

¹⁵ *Transactions of the Royal Irish Academy*, "Calendar of Oengus," (early ninth century, ed. Whitley Stokes), under Dec. 13, p. 182; also published by Henry Bradshaw Society.

¹⁶ *Cathreim Thoirdhealbhaigh*:—"Tullach nan espoc sanctified by bell and precious mass, by relic, gold-enshrined, by rare piety and notable miracles."

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of the Delahoydes. The shrine of St. Lachtin's arm,¹⁷ made for Cormac MacCarthy, king of Munster between 1118-27, was preserved in his church at Kilnamona, and about 1640 removed to Lislachtin Abbey in Kerry; no folklore seems attached to it. The crozier of St. Blawfugh, *i.e.* Blathmac, son of Onchu, was preserved at Rath, near Corofin, and then in a hole in the wall of the old chapel of Corofin, where it was used for very solemn swearing and was much feared. The crozier of St. Manaula (Bán Thola) of Dysert was purchased from an old woman, daughter of an O'Quin, its last hereditary keeper, and was held in great reverence for cures and as an object upon which oaths were taken. The most important of all these relics is the Clog-an-air, or "golden bell,"¹⁸ the empty bell shrine preserved by the Keanes of Beechpark, one of whom had married the daughter of one of the Keanes or O'Cahans the "coarbs" (*comharba*) or successors of St. Senan. It consists of a bronze cover of the twelfth century, adorned by later silver plates, and violation of an oath taken on this shrine twisted the perjurer's face or resulted in convulsions and death. It is told that a gentleman living in County Galway sent his servant to borrow the "bell" to test his servants about a theft. His messenger happened to be the thief, and on the way home again threw the dreaded object into the sea. He then boldly told his master that the Keanes would not lend it. "You are a liar," was the reply, "for there it is on the table before you." The man fell on his knees, and confessed. It was last asked for in 1834, when a farmer had been robbed of twenty pounds, and borrowed the "bell" to swear the neighbours after Mass. On the Saturday night before the ordeal his family was awakened by a crash, as something was thrown in through the window. This proved to be the missing notes, tied with the original string. There are many similar stories, and the Clog-an-air is said to have been stolen, but to have always returned to its rightful owners.¹⁹

¹⁷ An illustration of this was published by Vallancey in 1770. See Mr. Geo. Coffey's *Guide to the Christian Antiquities in the Collection of the Royal Irish Academy*, pp. 53-4, 60-2, and for the croziers of Dysert and Rath and bell of Rath, *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xxiv., pp. 337-9.

¹⁸ *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xxx., pp. 237-44.

¹⁹ Much of this information came from Mr. Marcus Keane of Beechpark, the present possessor, and the remainder from the paper cited in note 18.

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XVIII. *Animal and Plant Superstitions.*

773 I have had occasion to search, in Irish works of pre-Tudor date,
825 for sidelights on the early fauna of Ireland, and the results, so far,
are meagre. There is constant reference to dogs, cattle, horses,
deer, and wolves, but rarely do any but the hound put on any
definite shape. Even the bull plays little more part in the *Tain*
bo Cualgne than Briseis does in the *Iliad*, and generally the
animal is a mere appendage to an incident.

[103] *Cattle*.—Place-names give us little information save as to the
custom of driving the animals up to the hills in the summer time,
Mount Callan being girt by a series of "Boolies" (*i.e.* milking
places),²⁰ usually qualified by some phrase such as "of the sun"
or "of the sea-gulls." The cow was the practical unit of value in
olden times, three cows being worth a woman-slave, and a single
one the "ounce," which seems to have been an imaginary
standard. Legendary cows, such as the Glasgeivnagh and Glas
gamhnach, play a large part in the traditions, the hoofmarks of
the latter pitting all the rocks of eastern Burren and its borders.
Another supernatural cow predominates in the extreme west of
the barony, near Crumlin. The Seven Streams of Teeskagh were
said to originate from the exuberant milk of a "Glas." Super-
natural bulls and water cattle have already been dealt with.²¹

778 The most remarkable customs relating to cattle centre round
825 Lough Fergus. Along its north shore stand twelve cairns in an
233 irregular line. On the eighth from the east end are two natural
823 stones resembling a small chair and a cross, named after St.
[776] Forgas, (who appears in none of the calendars and is perhaps a
river-spirit). Along with these are put a china image, bits of iron,

²⁰ Boulavaun (white milking ground), Boulinradda (red place), Boolinduff
(black), Boulynamiscaun (of the dish), and Boulynagreana (sunny) at Callan;
Booltiagh, Boolybrien, Boolynagleeragh (of the clergy), Boolyknockaun,
Boolynesaka (of the cels), and Cloonbooley in Kilmaley; Boultiaghline in
Kilnaboy, (but the inhabitants say that Booltiagh means "mired by cattle"
not "milking place"); Boulynamwells (of sea-gulls) in Kilmihil; Boolty-
doolan in Killadyvert; and Boolleevin (pleasant) in Kilkeedy. In east Clare
the name is rare, Boolynacauk (of the Easter sports), in Slieve Bernagh, being
the only one known to me.

²¹ Vol. xxi., pp. 480-1.

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buttons, and broken crockery. Patients sit in the "chair" to cure lumbago. It is believed that the water of this lake cannot be boiled and that no one can be drowned by it, and sixty or seventy years ago cattle were cured by it. The beasts were brought in herds to the lake to drink, and were driven into it. If they turned to the right hand they would recover, but not if they swam to the left. It is said that on one occasion a cow sank, but was found next day grazing in a field beside the lake, completely cured. In consequence of drainage works, the water level has fallen, and the mud round the shore is too deep to allow the cattle to be driven through it, so on May Day every year, before sunrise, a little crowd gathers, of perhaps over 100 persons, to fill bottles with the water for curing cattle, especially of "the worm." The water keeps good till the next anniversary, and is also used to give a "good churning" and to clear a "garden" of caterpillars.²²

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In 1839 Lough Iona (now Eenagh) was reputed to cure sick cattle on Mondays and Thursdays.²³ In 1808 the smiths were in some districts employed to kill the cattle,—or rather to fell them for slaying,—and their perquisites were the animals' heads.²⁴

Persons over sixty years of age are often firm believers in the charming away, or "taking," of milk and butter. The younger folk usually deny that they hold this belief, and, where they take part in quarrels caused by it, avowedly only do so to support their elders. Two families living in the south-east corner of the county had about 1890 a quarrel resulting in a serious feud, hardly as yet appeased. It seems that for about three years the cows of the first household gave but little milk, and that little so bad and unwholesome for pigs and calves that several died. Ordinary veterinary practitioners, and even the local "knowing men," did no good, so the farmer sought a "wise man" of renown in another parish. This sage directed his client to watch the local well all May Eve, and to let no one come near it till after midnight. The farmer and his sons hid near it, saw a man and a woman of the

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²² *The Journal of the Limerick Field Club*, vol. ii.

²³ *Ordnance Survey Letters*, (Co. Clare), vol. I, p. 161.

²⁴ Hely Dutton, *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*, p. 359. The smith was a magician amongst the Irish, and the ancient *St. Patrick's Latria* prays against the spells of "smiths, women, and druids."

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773 that they had drowned themselves, and gave up the pursuit.¹⁴
823 Possibly the legend originated the association of indecency with
the Clare dolmens found in 1808 by Hely Dutton.¹⁵ A girl
[831] would not guide him to the fine one at Ballygannor until assured
● 778 that he was a stranger, for, it was explained to him, a woman
could refuse nothing to a man at one of these monuments. Some
such reason probably lay behind the belief that, if a couple
unblessed with children went to a *labba*, the defect in their house-
[842] hold was amended. I have been told that this belief existed
in Clare, but got no direct evidence of it. The Tuam an
goskaigh monument in Ballynahown was believed to be the grave
of a giant buried with his great sword, to recover which certain
young men dug and overthrew the stones; but they found
nothing, and afterwards prospered so ill that they had to
emigrate.¹⁶ Grania was supposed to be a male saint near Feakle,
and the "scoop" in the west end of Tobergrania dolmen-well at
Ballycroum was supposed to be the place where he put in his
head to drink.¹⁷ The long grave of Ballykelly, famed for its
lovely outlook high over the woods and lake of Doon on the
flank of Slieve Bernagh, was known as "Old Grania," but the
term "Granny's bed" was not unknown in East Clare. I heard
no legend of a "hag" at any dolmen. The alleged rites at the
"Druid's Altars" at Maryfort and Carnelly have already been
noted.¹⁸ When two blocks of the latter structure were removed
for use as gateposts, they returned during the night to their
original site, and were never again removed. The hand of the
destroyer of a dolmen near Ruan was struck by a splinter and
severely injured,¹⁹ the remains of the blocks being left where

¹⁴ Corcomroe legend, given to me by the late Prof. Brian O'Looney.

¹⁵ *Statistical Survey of the County of Clare*, p. 318. On the Continent indecent names and legends are also attached to dolmens; cf. Borlase, *Dolmens of Ireland*, vol. ii., p. 555; vol. iii., p. 845.

¹⁶ Messrs. Hilary and Kelleher of Oughtidarra.

¹⁷ So among the inhabitants in 1896-9.

¹⁸ Vol. xxii., p. 51.

¹⁹ Told to me by the sufferer. His predecessor, who had overthrown some blocks, was also unlucky. Cf. *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xxxv., p. 212.

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they lay,—but no vengeance overtook those who levelled many dolmens at Miltown near Tulla.

Basin stones occur not infrequently at or near dolmens, e.g. at Kiltanon and Newgrove near Tulla, and at Ballyganner and Cappaghkenedy on the borders of Burren, at the last of which five appear in one slab. In the *Life of St. Mochulleus*,²⁰ written in 1141, a basin "like a large *hydria*" was found in a polished block of stone when the saint was levelling the site of his church on Tulla hill. The basins were evidently regarded as very early in date even in the twelfth century. The basin of Doughnambragher (Dabhach nam brathar) at Kylecane has already been noticed.²¹ A large block with two basins is amongst the remains at the place of inauguration of the local kings at Magh Adhair.²²

Pillar stones and rocks.—*Boughils* ("petrified boys") and *farbreags* ("petrified men") have been referred to in Section I.²³ A frog-like natural rock, close to the west side of the road from Kilkishen to Fortanne, was blasted and removed after 1887, but I have a sketch of it made in that year. There was a vague saying that it had been made, (and I think I was told also that it was a creature petrified when cursed), by some saint. The Coad stone is said to have been the same height (*com fhod*, "equal height or length," whence *Co'ad*),²⁴ as King Teige Acomhad O'Brien about 1460. It, the Cloghlea near Tomgraney, and the "cross" near Kilmoon were evidently boundary marks of church lands. Another legend of Coad

²⁰ *Analecta Bollandiana*, vol. xvii.; *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xlii, p. 9. The basin was filled with milk by a hind. Similar legends are found in Glendalough (County Wicklow) and elsewhere. Giraldus tells how a hollow stone at Skellig used to be filled with wine for the sacrament.

²¹ Vol. xxii. (Plate IV). The name is Killian on the map, but is pronounced Kyle-e-an, with a long stress on the last syllable.

²² *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xpvii, p. 79, vol. xxxiv., pp. 190-1.

²³ Vol. xxi., pp. 183, 186, and the legend of Knocknasearbreaga on p. 185; *Proceedings of the Royal Irish Academy*, vol. xxiv. (c), p. 97, vol. xxvi. (c), p. 471.

²⁴ *Com-fhod* is also a synonym for a grave.

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823 stone was that the *liagunn*²⁵ was exacted by a father from the
778 slayer of his son, and was the length of the victim. The story of
Prince Lachtna (ante 840) tells that an adviser of King Phelim
of Cashel tried to arouse his suspicions of Lachtna by an alleged
oracle of a pillar stone Liag na neasain, near Killaloe, against
"a fair man from Craglea."

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²⁵ Dr. G. U. MacNamara. A *liagunn* of equal length to the slain son of the
Dugda was claimed as an *eric* by the victim's father, "Dind Senchas", *Revue
Celtique*, vol. xvi., p. 42.

(To be continued.)

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slain.⁵ Another *Fhir mór* (or huge man) was hunted from Cahermurphy stone fort to Kiltumper, where he was slain and buried.⁶ Caherdooneerish was in the tenth century reputed to have been made by Irgus, a *Firbolg*, at the beginning of our era; it was wrongly attributed by scholars to Fergus, son of Roigh, but the peasantry never abandoned the name of the brother of Aenghus of Dun Aengusa in Aran.

Unlike some old schools of antiquaries, the people did not overlook the later origin of some forts, for they attributed the Grianan and Bealboruma to King Brian Boru (c. 1000), the former to defend his horse-paddock (*parc an each*) on the shoulder of Craglea. The fort of Lisnagry, in the heart of the hills near Broadford, was reputed to be the hiding-place of the great king's cattle from the Danes. King Croohoore (Conor) na Siudaine O'Brien (slain 1267) was said to have built Dunconor, the great stone fort in Inishere Aran which MacLiag's poem (c. 1000) attributes to Conchraid the *Firbolg*. The same king, we may note, executed the latest earthworks of a fort recorded in Clare history, at Clonroad, completing the royal *rath* commenced by his father and left unfinished in 1241. Some rebuilding of Dun Conor may quite conceivably have been undertaken in his reign.

To the fairy forts previously mentioned should be added Lissateeaun, near Lisdoonvarna. The people of Tulla had an observance by which the instigator of the destruction of a fort assumed the blame and freed the workman.

Churches.—The church of Clonlea once stood at the opposite side of the lake, near St. Senan's well in Killaneena, whence one night it travelled down the old lane that runs into the lake, passed under the water, and reached its present site. King Conor na Siudaine built Corcomroe Abbey, and, as soon as his five skilled masons had completed the beautiful chancel and chapels, he put them to death lest they should build a rival masterpiece elsewhere. This legend is now being transferred through modern guide-books, the careless compilation of which is a great source of corruption of our legends, to Donald O'Brien, the actual, but not traditional,

⁵ *The Journal of the Royal Society of Antiquaries of Ireland*, vol. xxxv., p. 346.

⁶ *Ordnance Survey Letters* (Co. Clare), vol. i., p. 205.

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Senan "built seven churches and a beautiful high belfry" there, and how "St. Cairmin, a vigorous chieftain, erected seven churches and a high belfry" on Lough Derg. Legend told that St. Senan, while building his tower, was interrupted by a woman, and left it unfinished.¹⁰ St. Blawfugh (Blathmac) built two towers at Rathblamac, one of which was stolen and brought to Dysert O'Dea by St. Manawla. Of the bells of Dromcliff and Kilnaboy towers I have already told.¹¹ Kilnaboy tower was broken down by "the bombardment of Cromwell." The round tower at Tomgraney was faintly remembered, in Petrie's time, as like that on Iniscaltra, but it has long since been forgotten.

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Crosses and monuments.—I have already mentioned the cross of Dysert O'Dea,¹² which was unusual in having portions of its carvings on separate pieces of stone, some of which are lost. The cross fell twice, and was re-erected by Conor Crone O'Dea in 1683 and by Col. Syngé of Mount Callan in 1872; each benefactor died in the year following his restoration of the cross. The breaking off or fall of any portion of the monument of Sir Donal O'Brien, the first of the baronets of Dromoland, in Kilnasoolagh church, is fatal to his descendants, and so is any attempt to clean or repair it, tradition alleging that one of the O'Briens always dies in either case.¹³ My own family believed that, if the family vault were opened, it had soon to be opened twice again to receive new occupants.

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Underground passages.—One is said to lead from Cahercrochaun to Dundahlin on Loop Head, and another from the great promontory fort of Dundoillroe eastwards, where a brown track, probably an old road, still remains. A third ran through Barnagosaigh to the Tuamnagosaigh in Ballynahown, near Lisdoonvarna, where there is a roofed cleft of some length. A fourth went from Bealboruma fort under the Shannon; through it the angry Brian Boru sent soldiers to waylay and kill his slandered

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¹⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 18. The same tale is told of St. Declan and the beautiful perfect round tower of Ardmore, County Waterford.

¹¹ Vol. xxii., p. 336; *Ordnance Survey Letters* (Co. Clare), vol. i., p. 144.

¹² Vol. xxii., pp. 57, 456.

¹³ The fall of an angel not long before the death of the late Lord Inchiquin greatly strengthened the belief.

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MacNamara.¹⁷ A certain Flann MacDonnchaidh, a very poor man, lived near the bush long ago, and dreamt "again and again" that, if he went to the Bald Bridge, Droichiod maol-na-Luimneagh (Ball's Bridge in Limerick City), he would find money and make his fortune. He went there and walked up and down until he was worn out. He was on the point of going away when a cobbler asked him what he was about, and he told his story. The cobbler laughed, and told how he himself had dreamed of finding treasure under a bush at a place called Skaghvickencrow, but had wasted no time in looking for it.¹⁸ MacDonnchaidh returned home, dug, and found a flag with an inscription in an unknown tongue. He left the stone on his hearth, and, as no local scholar could read it, he troubled no more about the matter. Years went by, and one night a wandering schoolmaster asked for hospitality, and of course got it. The "angel unawares" translated the inscription as "one side is more lucky than the other." Next day, when his guest was gone, MacDonnchaidh dug, and found so much money as to make rich men of himself and his descendants.¹⁹ 173 556

The only tale of church treasure I have met with is that the silver bells of either Killeany or Kilmoon church lie hidden in the brook between their ruins called from the legend Owenacluggan. [574]

Funerals and graveyards.—Though I have frequently attended funerals of persons of all classes and denominations in many parts of Clare, I have very little to tell of the ceremonies. Sometimes I have seen spades crossed on a grave, and long ago saw three crosses, made of twigs from a hawthorn tree in a graveyard, placed on a coffin. The body is usually carried feet foremost round the graveyard sunwise, and sometimes, but rarely, three times. The horrible habit of digging out all the contents of the grave is usual; the older coffin planks are thrown away, and the human remains [578] ●

¹⁷ *The Journal of the Limerick Field Club*, Part 4, p. 42.

¹⁸ Cf. the well-known story of the Swaffham tinker and London Bridge.

¹⁹ I heard this tale, perhaps in 1870, from John O'Halloran at Edenvale near Ennis, about the Crowes. Certainly that family (MacEnchroe's) has a hawthorn bush in its armorial bearings, and the motto "Skagh M'Enchroe." Dr. MacNamara conjectures that Flann's surname was really MacEnchroe. [554 551]

12 • THE ISLAND AND ITS PAST

turies afterward, and still do in modified form, and became embodied in the medieval culture which was shaped by internal innovation and borrowing from other European traditions. Christianity came to Inis Beag in the early decades of the sixth century. Inis Beag and the other islands in the vicinity became one of the famous monastic centers of Ireland, where over a hundred saints lived or paid extended visits. Among them were St. Enda of the Aran Islands, St. Columbkille who was to Christianize Scotland and much of England, St. Kieran the founder of Clonmacnoise, St. Brendan the Navigator who according to Irish legend reached the coast of Florida in 551, and St. Kevin the founder of Glendalough. Among the principal medieval Christian monuments in Inis Beag are three churches, one and possibly two monasteries, several tombs, and a sacred well.

Only a single female saint is associated with Inis Beag, and a church in her honor stands on the northwest side of the island. Although not the first church on the site, the present building was erected not later than the ninth century, and west of its doorway under a cliff is the foundation of a *clochán* in which the officiating clergyman may have resided. South of the church are a number of ancient tombs, and in a small valley east of it a layer of midden lies beneath manufactured soil. The axe heads were unearthed in the valley only a stone's throw from the church.

Built in the tenth century to honor the patron saint of the island, a second church is located atop a terrace overlooking the beach on the northeast side of Inis Beag. It was used as the regular place of worship until about 1840, when sand began to accumulate about it; at that time, the island cemetery was on a slight hill west of the church, but as the sand grew deeper burials were made next to the church, eventually to form the present cemetery which rings the building almost completely. The tomb of the patron saint stands on the surface of the terrace a short distance from the church, but it and the building nearly to the top of its gables are buried in the sand (see Fig. 3). Each year on June 14th island men dig out the interior of the church and bare the tomb to commemorate the saint. A huge midden, partially covered with sand and solidified to a conglomerate below its surface, is banked against the terrace on the north and measures 20 feet in depth, 150 feet in width, and 450 feet in length. It represents the accumulation of hundreds of years, and possibly thousands if pagan structures antedated Christian ones.

A third church lies buried beneath the sand close to the east end of the beach, and is named after another saint who is believed to be interred near it. Only legend supports its existence, for there is no reference to its unencumbered appearance in the writings of the earliest visitors in the mid-seventeenth century. However, funeral processions bound from the present church to the cemetery leave the main trail to follow what is apparently an archaic predecessor deep in the sand, and at one point the coffin is lowered and the mourners kneel and pray for the soul of the deceased at the place where tradition asserts that the ancient church lies. This custom is disconcerting to the newly appointed or visiting priest, who sometimes when leading a funeral procession will continue on the modern path while the islanders desert him to obey a centuries old prescription.

On the west side of Inis Beag, near the shore, are located a holy well named after a saint and the *clochán* in which he supposedly dwelled during a lengthy stay

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Figure 3. Church of the patron saints and the cemetery

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on the island during the early part of the sixth century. A low wall with two openings has been constructed about the spring, and it is visited frequently by those wishing to obtain water or to pray. I was told by the owners of surrounding fields that when they were children many gallery grave tombs stood in the area, but most of these were removed when the fields first were improved and seeded. Most islanders will not molest prehistoric and medieval monuments, especially those that they believe are burial places, out of reverence for the dead or fear of the ghosts or fairies who reside within them; but down the centuries, such structures gradually have disappeared by being torn down to satisfy building and farming needs. It is the emphatic claim of the folk that the sacred well was created miraculously by the visiting saint and has never dried up, but two unbiased observers reported to me that they had seen it waterless during especially dry summers.

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At least twice during the Middle Ages Inis Beag was laid waste by invading forces: first by Vikings in 1081 (and maybe on other occasions between the ninth and eleventh centuries, when much of Ireland came under the control of Norwegians and Danes), and then in 1334 by Sir John Darcy, the Lord Justice of Ireland, who with a large fleet and army sailed around the Irish coast implementing British rule. The islanders believe that Inis Beag was completely depopulated by the Vikings and possibly by the Darcy expedition, and again by wars once, and maybe twice, during the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries.

Modern Period (1500 to 1900)

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The castle in Inis Beag built within the Celtic promontory fort, probably erected in the sixteenth century by the mainland family who owned the island,

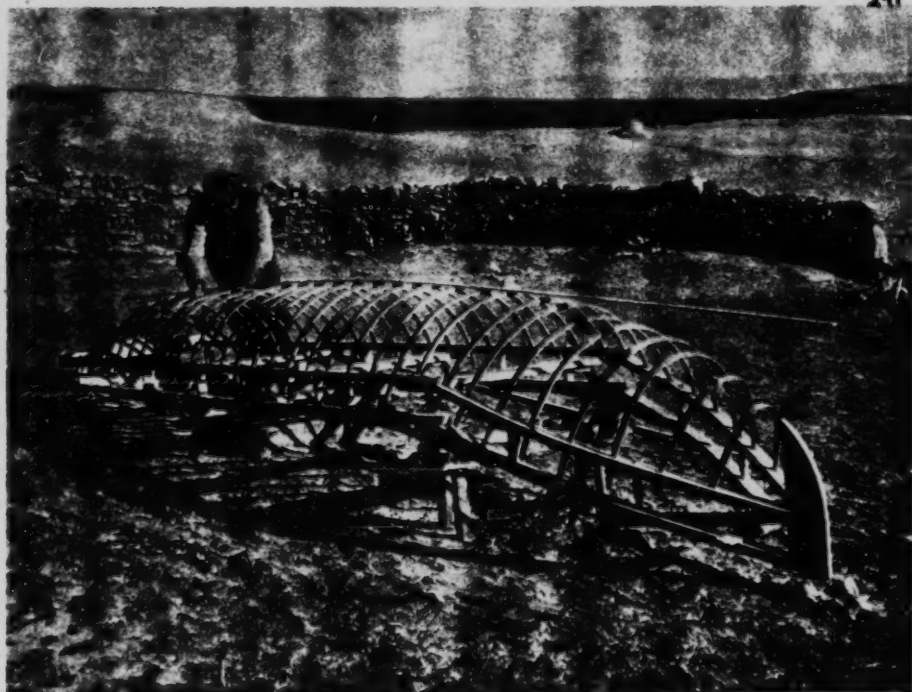


Figure 10. Assembling latbes in the construction of a canoe

folk of neighboring islands as well as mainland seamen for many miles around. A curach takes a week of steady work to construct, and the builder is paid 6 pounds for his labor and a shopkeeper 12 pounds for the materials.

The curate blesses a newly manufactured canoe, and a small bottle of holy water is kept in its bow to afford the crew magical protection. Some fishermen seek further spiritual assistance by tipping their caps and making the sign of the cross with salt water before shoving off, especially if they are about to encounter hazardous weather conditions or are to make a long voyage. One of the many omens known to the folk is a "prayer to guide you safely," passed down from the time of St. Patrick, it is claimed, which is uttered by fishermen ready to put out to sea; if two mistakes are made in its recitation, danger is in the offing and the trip is postponed or cancelled. Another sign of impending peril which will cause postponement of a fishing trip is for one of the crew to meet a red-haired woman on the trail as he walks to the strand to embark.

The knit sweater, called a "ganzie," is not a traditional item of wear, as is

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776

three sisters, and ten of two—and they tend to visit together often and lend mutual economic and emotional support.

When a man marries, his parents relinquish the holding, and its direction passes into the hands of the newlyweds. Arensberg and Kimball talk of the "west room" complex, which may exist in many parts of peasant Ireland but does not in Inis Beag. Houses in north and west Co. Clare "with remarkable uniformity" are aligned east and west, and on the son's marriage the old couple moves into the westernmost room "behind the hearth." This room is linked with the Celtic supernatural, for fairy paths are thought to be located along the western side of many houses, and the pagan afterworld—the Isle of the Blest—is a sunken land mass in the nearby western sea (Arensberg and Kimball 1940:134-136). In Inis Beag, on the contrary, over one-third of the domiciles since 1841 have been aligned north and south, fairy trails are found mostly at the back of the island, and a retiring couple may choose any of three rooms (or more in modern homes) to move into. The west room of Co. Clare is called simply "the room" in Inis Beag.

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Thirty-four of the 71 inhabited buildings in the island have thatched roofs (see Fig. 8), while the others are antiquated houses which lately have been renovated, mainly by replacing thatch with slate, or are newly built. The last of the traditional "cabins" or "cottages" were constructed in the 1930s, and the first of the modern ones during the 1890s—with two stories initially, and styled and subsidized by the Congested Districts Board. Old and renovated houses are rectangular in shape, are constructed of whitewashed stones with concrete floors, and have a large central kitchen with doors or half-doors to the outside both front and back. "The room" is beyond the kitchen at one end of the building, and two bedrooms (one in the most ancient cabins) are at the other. Lofts for sleeping are in the gable of the roof above "the room" and bedrooms, and are entered by ladder [312] or staircase from the kitchen. Fireplaces share a common wall and chimney between the kitchen and "the room," as they also may between the two bedrooms; but the kitchen hearth is the most used, and in some homes is not permitted to die out.

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The space between the cottage and the low stone wall and outbuildings surrounding it is called the "street." Outbuildings at the back include a toilet and various storage sheds—for spuds and turf sods in particular, although the latter often are stacked instead against a gable of the cabin. In a portion of the street or a small field beyond the wall, a garden for vegetables is maintained for easy access.

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[415]
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The kitchen doors of the house sometimes open into small halls in the front or back, or both, and when the weather is not too cold or blustery, the door opening to the street on the windward side is kept closed and its opposite open. In the kitchen, which is the center of family activities, are: the fireplace at which cooking is done with pot and cooking ovens hung from an iron hook; the table around which the family eats their five daily meals; the sideboard, known as a "dresser," filled with "delph"—both everyday and "best" china; the religious shrine with "blessed lamp" surrounded by religious pictures and sacred objects; and, occasionally, a "settlebed" which, when closed, serves as a bench during the daytime.

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The hearth in the kitchen is indented into the wall to provide two hobs, or seats, and on a chilly or dampish day the folk will nestle inside the fireplace and sit tightly together on a bench drawn up close to the turf fire for warmth. This

796 to put their property in a state of good repair, which, in retrospect, is regarded as a benefit, however much they might have complained of the labor involved during the previous weeks.

• 778 The sacred well, probably appropriated from the Druids 13 centuries ago, still attracts the folk and occasionally pilgrims from Inis Thiar and other islands. (174)
(184) On the mainland, patterns often were associated with holy wells named after (178)
(798) saints, but this does not seem to have been the case in Inis Beag. It was customary until about ten years ago for those who came to pray here to attach bits of cloth, rosaries, or sacred objects obtained from holy places of pilgrimage on the mainland and abroad, but this practice was halted by the clergy as smacking of paganism. Now it is visited for religious purposes mostly by small groups on Sunday (188)
(189) afternoon, and by persons about to emigrate and their families who come to pray for the good fortune of the soon departed. The water in the spring is not considered (155)
(155) holy, but capable of "bringing the grace of God and the saint," and if it is drunk during prayer, it is believed to be especially efficacious for curing sterility, among other afflictions. In this century, a partially blind islander is believed to have regained his sight after paying nine visits to the well on successive Sundays, and (781)
(781) other miraculous cures from earlier times are reported. Those who come to the spring always seek a tiny fish or eel in the water, which, if observed, is merely a good omen to some but an assurance of reaching Heaven to others. Attaching rags to the well and seeking cures and omens there are all examples of reinterpretation. (312)
(312) The spring also is used as a source of water by farmers who pasture stock in nearby fields and by thirsting passersby.

Pagan Supernaturalism

771 Pagan supernaturalism is disavowed by the folk, and it is difficult to know
798 how widely held are beliefs in this sphere. That they are held is indisputable, as
178 attested by the active efforts of curates up to this day to eradicate them. Youth of
(173) the island overtly deny the existence of other than church approved spiritual en-
(187) tities, although the most outspoken disclaimer of paganism among them is visited occasionally by the ghost of his father, who urges the continuation of a family feud. But elders cling tenaciously to indigenous beliefs and practices, about which they are extremely secretive for fear of being ridiculed by outsiders and their more skeptical fellows. Defensive about being labeled backward, the islanders feel that (829)
(829) the "superstitions" they are said to hold most contribute to this impression. When the folk talk of pagan retentions and reinterpretations, they ascribe them to those who lived at the time that their parents or grandparents did, or to certain of their superstitious contemporaries. A notorious dissenter, who sometimes has occasion (776)
(776) to patrol the shores of Inis Beag before dawn, antagonizes his neighbors by deriding them for their fear of venturing after dark to the back of the island, where fairies and ghosts hold sway. On telling him of my intention to spend a night (115)
(115) resting atop a *clochán* near the Atlantic coast, he said, "The only thing that will happen is you'll hear the cocks crow in the morning." He is the only person who admitted to me that he disbelieves the teachings of the church concerning the soul

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787 ing souls of children and leaving in their place changelings, who gradually sicken
[753] and die. Since boys are favored over girls, Irish peasants of the region until
[662] recently dressed their male offspring in petticoats, sometimes up to the age of 18
[789] years, to deceive the little people. Even now parents are loath to praise the health
or beauty of their children for fear that the gentry will overhear and be prompted
to victimize their souls.

[114] Solitary fairies are described by Yeats as "withered, old, and solitary, in
every way unlike the sociable [trooping fairies]. . . . They dress with all unfairy
homeliness, and are, indeed, most sluttish, slouching, peering, mischievous phan-
toms" (Yeats ND :76). The long occupation of Inis Beag by leprechauns is
776 evidenced by the Garden of the Cobbler and a spring at the back of the island,
778 shaped like the sole of a shoe, which is known as Well of the Boot. Occasionally a
leprechaun has been seen in the former location, but only the sound of a tapping
hammer has been heard in the latter. Instead of guarding a buried pot of gold at
the foot of a rainbow, as popularly conceived, the leprechaun of Inis Beag possesses
a small purse in which he keeps but a single coin. Children sometimes are urged

[823] to hunt for the hidden purse, as a distraction by harassed parents. The rift valley
between Castle and High Villages is thought to be the home of at least one "red
man." He wears a pointed cap to denote cleverness and has a laugh, as distinctive
as the hammering of the leprechaun, by which his presence is known. A practical
joker with poltergeist qualities, the red man prefers to frequent houses, where
[123] his mischief is countered with bottles of holy water. From November of 1959
until June of 1963, my wife and I experienced, first in Inis Beag and then in our
home in the United States, the antics of an unseen being who opened doors and
windows, turned on lights and water faucets, and imbibed our Irish whiskey.
Tongue-in-cheek, we placed the blame for these uncanny occurrences on an
amiable solitary fairy who had attached himself to us, but eventually I felt com-
pelled to report our unique contact with the Celtic supernatural to the anthro-
pological community—a gesture regarded as "poison oak in the scientific groves of
academe" (Messenger 1962:367-373).

763 The spiritual omens of death are three in Inis Beag: the sound of trooping
776 fairies building a coffin for the victim, soft tapping on the window pane of his
bedroom, and the wailing of the banshee during the night before his demise. No
one has ever viewed the banshee, but many have heard her cry out in the night,
and the keen of Celtic derivation is said to be an imitation of her funeral call.
[428] She attaches herself only to certain families which inherit her patrilineally. An
[123] aged Inis Beag man was seriously ill with influenza on the night that my wife and
I sponsored a dancing party, and a young man departing from it three hours after
midnight played his accordion as he walked to his home located near that of the
sick person. On learning of this event, the nurse shortly after dawn hurried to her
patient to assure him that the wails he might have heard came from the instrument
of the inexpert youth and not from the family banshee; at this news, thanatomania
was prevented and the man lived another three weeks, when the banshee at last
cried and was heard by those at his deathbed. Opinion is divided as to whether it
is the fairies or the banshee who announce death by window tapping, but as a
practical joke islanders long ago used to tap on the bedroom windows of those
[522] persons considered overly superstitious.

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persons considered overly superstitious. Interesting to note here is the fact that even before the beginning of this century, strength of belief in the pagan supernatural varied among the folk.

Three water dwellers found in the ocean surrounding Inis Beag are the mermaid, sea spirit, and water horse. At least one and maybe three mermaids are associated with particular locations along the coastline of the island. This spirit usually is found sitting on a rock with her fish tail in the water and combing her long hair, although she has been seen hovering over the surface of the sea in a "robe of mist." Discussion of her in the pubs always induces embarrassment among the men, because her perfectly formed female upper body is nude and not always hidden by her tresses; she appears to delight in exposing herself to the puritanical folk. The sea spirit is called the "headless body" for the reason that his seaweed covered hulk lacks any appendages. Like the seal who bears a human soul, he favors following in the wake of *curach*—bobbing up and down in the water and staring balefully at the seamen with huge eyes. Only by dropping an object containing gold into the ocean deeps, which the spirit finds irresistible, can his pursuit be impeded short of rowing back to the island. My wife and I brought to Inis Beag a foot-high statue of a troll, purchased two years before in Norway, made of moss with large glass eyes, which we hung from the wall of our kitchen (as we had from the dashboard of our car) as a good luck charm. It aroused excitement among fishermen who visited us because of its resemblance to the headless body; one man reasoned that this being must inhabit all of the northern seas, and probably arouses equal consternation among Scottish and Scandinavian seafarers. The water horse is a demon counterpart of the mermaid, with black body of a steed and tail of a giant fish. Until 40 years ago, it lived in the fresh water lake of Inis Beag, where it was seen on certain nights traveling abreast the surface with its head held high and mane waving in the wind. Now it is seen only at sea and infrequently at great distance.

The single pookah of Inis Beag resides in a Copper-Bronze Age tumulus (see Fig. 12), which became a medieval cemetery with rough headstones still in place; located on the western margin of the common land, it is known as the Hill of Ferns. In the Middle Ages, the church urged systematic reinterpretation of Christian and pagan elements (It was advocated as early as 601 by Pope Gregory VII in a letter to priests who were proselytizing the primitive Britons.). This policy is attested in Inis Beag and neighboring islands not only by Christian graveyards being located contiguous to pagan ones, but by Christian church buildings incorporating Druidic temples and Celtic holy wells being appropriated by Christian worshippers. During the day, the "dog of the tumulus," as this demon is called, will twist the limbs of unwary individuals who chance to fall asleep on the mound, and at night it is known to race across the sands of strand and common land, altering its size at will from that of a small dog to that of a bull, to frighten those who might be passing. It appears that Irish emigrants carried both the mermaid and pookah abroad with them as early as the seventeenth century, at least to the West Indies. In doing research among the "Black Irish" of Montserrat during 1965, 1966, and last year, I discovered a mermaid with white skin who guards a pot of gold buried on top of Chance's Mountain, and a pookah in the form of a



Figure 12. Copper-Bronze Age tumulus—home of the pookah

776 black dog which roams the road by the Catholic church and cemetery in the
[771] village of St. Patrick, altering its size instantaneously (Messenger 1967:37-38).

754 Witchcraft once flourished in Inis Beag, so it is held, but today only the
178 casting of the evil eye still is practiced. The most common witch of the past was
an ugly old woman, called a "hag witch," who was native to Inis Beag or a
transient nighttime intruder from nearby islands and the mainland. She was able
to fly through the air swiftly, make herself invisible, assume any size or shape, enter
the body of an animal, and perpetrate black magic. Her favorite animal familiar
was the rabbit and her favorite target the cow, whose milk she purloined after
midnight from beasts pastured at the back of the island. Like the trooping fairies,
753 she too stole the souls of children and left ailing changelings in their stead. When
755 it was suspected by parents that a child was a changeling rather than their human
855 offspring, it was customary to throw it into the fireplace or burn the bedding on
which it lay in order to retrieve the departed soul; if the perpetrator were a witch,
she would leap from the flames with a "wild shriek" and vanish, leaving the
restored child in perfect health in her place. I was told in Inis Thiar of islanders
there who bear scars from being burned when their souls were rescued by this
expediency.

754 Three Inis Beag persons are accused of possessing the evil eye and thus
[624] are shunned by their fellows. Such a witch is known by a disfigurement in or near
[576] his left eye, from which the malignant force emanates, and by his ability to cause

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175 November 1st. Imbolc heralded the coming of spring with the lactation of ewes,
796 while at Beltaine cattle were driven to open grazing after passing between bon-
221 fires which magically protected them against disease and ensured their fertility.
The harvest commenced with Lughnasa, and the grazing season ended with
796 Samhain. Of these festivals, Imbolc has become reinterpreted with the feast of St.
178 Brigid; Beltaine and Samhain, known today as May Day and Allhallows respec-
[771] tively, have remained almost untouched by Christianity and are observed in
[114] Inis Beag; but Lughnasa has disappeared from island tradition. Lughnasa still is
celebrated in many parts of Ireland and is the subject of a monumental folklore
study—Maire MacNeill's *The Festival of Lughnasa*; until the introduction of
early potatoes into Inis Beag, harvesting commenced on this day, but any other
practices associated with Lughnasa were abandoned long ago. Minor pagan festi-
vals have become reinterpreted with Whitsuntide and the feasts of St. John, St.
Martin, and St. Stephen, all of which are observed in Inis Beag.

776 Brigid, the most renowned of Irish female saints, was a cowherd and
[824] therefore is associated with cattle and with flowers, such as the dandelion, which
nourish young lambs in the spring. On the last day of January, a small "Brigid's
776 Cross" is fashioned from straw in each household of Inis Beag, and is thrust into
• 778 the thatching at the end of the feast day. Crosses once were made from rushes,
[824] wood, metal, and even paper, and it is possible to determine the age of a thatched
[174] cottage being dismantled or renovated by counting the number of crosses salvaged
[175] from the straw debris. The Celts worshipped the sun whose symbol was the
swastika, and the Brigid's Cross takes this form. It is a charm which protects the
house (and the byre on the mainland) and those within it from harm, especially
776 by fire, during the year. At the beginning of this century, a destitute woman who
776 lived alone used to go from door to door begging for food and carrying a large
778 "Brigid's Doll" made of straw and dressed immaculately in white with a picture
of the saint on its breast. Some of the folk pulled straw from the doll to manu-
[538] facture their crosses. After the woman recited the following poem, she was pre-
[782] sented with food in honor of the saint, for which she blessed each person in the
household with the doll:

[539]

Here comes Brigid
Dressed in white.
Give her something
For the night.

She is deaf and
She is dumb.
For God's sake,
Give her some.

536 Today, small groups of girls travel about the island emulating their predecessor
735 by begging for coins to buy candy and donate to the church. A Brigid's Doll dressed
431 in confirmation garb is carried by the leader of each group, and is used to confer
776 blessings after the girls have recited in unison the two verses.
778

796 May Eve and Allhallows' Eve are both times when it is dangerous to go
776 out of doors alone at night or be abroad after midnight, for the "big fellow"
[822] roams the back of the island, and everywhere pagan fairies, witches, vindictive
[778] ghosts, and the dog of the tumulus search for human victims. The safety of cattle
[233] is of particular concern to the folk on May Eve, and a common practice is to
attach to the horn or tail of a cow a cloth containing a piece of iron which has

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been blessed, to protect the beast from milk pilfering fairies and hag witches. Among the taboos associated with May Day are those prohibiting the visiting of wells before dawn and giving away fire; as regards the latter taboo, to do so is to "give away the luck of the farm" for a year. Flowers are placed on the altars of the two medieval churches in the early morning of May Day, and at one time garlands of flowers shaped like a horseshoe were hung on door posts for luck. Souls of the dead are especially feared on Allhallows' Eve, and are placated in the Catholic tradition a day later on the feast of All Souls. The telling of stories is tabooed on Allhallows' Day, and the fairies are said to spoil wild blackberries for future eating with their before dawn depredations. My wife and I invited in a small group of islanders to celebrate Halloween in 1959, and we spent much of the evening having our fortunes told by an old man as it was done on this night when he was a youth; he poured melted lead through a key handle into a pan of cold water and made his prognostications by interpreting the configurations formed by the quick hardening metal.

Whitsuntide is the week beginning with the feast of Pentecost, or Whitsunday, but in Inis Beag it extends to the feast of Corpus Christi and is known as the "kinkish time," when once again evil forces hold sway in the island. Usually the weather is "heavy and close" and very changeable, I was told, and people tend to be irritable and more depressed than usual. Men do not cut their hair, nor does anyone wash themselves, during these 12 days. Although the pookah is always a danger, it is more active at this time than during the rest of the year, and children and visitors are warned not to fall asleep outside or even to sit down on the ground unless accompanied by others, whose presence will thwart any attempts by the demon to twist their limbs. Some islanders will not undertake major tasks or decide on important issues during Whitsuntide. Whereas Christmas and Easter are considered "lucky times," the "kinkish time" is unlucky, and those born then may have the evil eye or be destined to die violently or take a life.

In 1960, Corpus Christi was celebrated June 16th—two days after pattern day and eight days before St. John's Eve. The latter is one of several midsummer celebrations reported from Ireland which mark the summer solstice. Boys gather wood and tend a huge bonfire lighted just after sunset on the common land of Inis Beag, and a few islanders carry coals from it to their homes and fields for protection and to guarantee the fertility of their wives and female livestock. A man complained to me that an infection in his son's finger was caused by the failure of the boy to procure a coal from the fire as instructed. On that evening, the folk congregate outside of their cottages and along the terrace roads to watch the hundreds of bonfires alight on the mainland coast. In the past, cows were driven between twin bonfires as at Beltaine, and barren women and those yet to marry leaped over the dying flames. One of the most brilliant satirical novels of Irish life—both cruel and insightful—is Tracy's *The Straight and Narrow Path*, the plot of which focuses on the difficulties encountered by a vacationing British anthropologist after he writes for a newspaper an eye witness account of nuns jumping a St. John's Eve bonfire.

The legends are several and varied in Ireland about the life of St. Martin (O Suilleabhain 1957:252-261). There is no saint of this name who is of Irish

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